COMMUNITY TRENDS AND NEEDS IN HAMILTON-WENTWORTH

1986-87

A Report to the United Way
Agency Relations Committee

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April, 1986

THE SOCIAL PLANNING and RESEARCH COUNCIL of Hamilton and District

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The purpose of this brief is to provide a general overview of social trends and community needs in Hamilton-Wentworth during the coming years.

SOCIAL TRENDS

Population Changes:

Between 1982 and 1985, the Regional population increased by 1.6 percent (6621 persons) to 421,264 people. Hamilton-Wentworth will continue to face a slow growth scenario in the coming years. Population is projected to increase by only 2.3 percent between 1986 and 1991.

While the City of Hamilton's population has decreased slightly over the past few years, both Ancaster and Stoney Creek have witnessed increases of over 10 percent between 1982 and 1985.

The youth population in the Region is expected to increase between 1986 and 1991 and then decline between 1991 and 2001. The proportion of seniors is expected to increase significantly during the next 15 years to a point where 13 percent of the Regional population will be over 64 years by 2001. The Region is experiencing a gradual aging of family heads of households as the post-war baby-boom passes through adulthood.

Population Structure:

The Region has experienced an increase in the proportion of people married and divorced but a decrease in the proportion of singles. Adult offspring appear to be living with their parents longer and the sharing of homes among relatives and friends beyond the school years appears to be increasing.

The birthrate and marriage rate both declined between 1970 and 1980, however, there is likely to be an increasing number of births over the next few years as the post-war baby-boom reaches the prime child-bearing years. The 'mini-echo' baby-boom impact will be smaller than

anticipated since many women are having few, if any, children and are waiting until their late 20's and early 30's to have children.

The percentage of single-parent families (11 percent) will continue to increase in the Region. The proportion of female-headed single-parent families (85 percent) is not forecasted to decrease in future years.

The ethnic composition of the population will continue to be diversified as the percentage of 'non-British' persons increases in the Region.

Employment Trends:

Hamilton-Wentworth was particularly hard hit by the 1982/83 recession. Unemployment reached 16.7 percent. By November 1985, however, the local unemployment rate had dropped to 5.5 percent.

While this decline in unemployment is welcome relief for the Region, many workers laid-off during the recession have not been re-hired. Certainly, Hamilton's large manufacturing sector is undergoing structural change. Young people, women and older workers appear to be among those most affected by the recession.

In the future, we can expect an increase in the part-time labour force and slow economic growth. Clarkson Gordon/Woods Gordon, in Tomorrow's Customers, projects that unemployment rates will be in the 8-9 percent range by 1994. They anticipate that industries will continue to move from labour-intensive to capital-intensive (automated) operations. Employment in manufacturing and construction is expected to decline while service sector employment will increase. Personal savings rates will drop from 11-12 percent to 9 percent by 1990. Average wages are expected to increase by about 6 percent a year, as is the Consumer Price Index, through to 1994.

Income Maintenance:

The Regional Social Services Department has projected the General Welfare caseload to decrease to 7,251 cases by the end of 1986. It is predicted that the total caseload will decrease by 6.6 percent from 1985. This is not surprising in view of the projected decline in local unemployment.

In Hamilton-Wentworth, the proportion of poor families (14 percent) and poor unattached individuals (41 percent) is higher than the provincial average. There is no reason to expect this pattern to alter significantly in the future. If the Region follows national trends, it is reasonable to expect that half of all single-parent women, unattached women and unattached elderly are poor. Employment incomes of women remain 50 percent lower than average male employment incomes.

While the local unemployment rates and General Welfare caseloads have dropped recently, the economic 'recovery' will not benefit all of those hit by the recession, particularly women and youth who are usually the first fired and last re-hired.

Housing Patterns:

The housing options available to people wanting to rent in Hamilton-Wentworth are extremely limited. The average vacancy rate in the area (including Burlington) was 0.4 percent in 1985. This is well below the acceptable level of 2.0 percent. It is not likely that this situation will alter significantly in the future. Rent increases have been kept to small increments due to rent control and will remain so in the foreseeable future.

The purchase (home-owner) market is likely to experience brisk movement as potential home-owners take advantage of lower interest rates and moderately priced accommodation in the Region during 1986.

The demand for subsidized housing far outstrips the supply of units. There may be as many as 2,000 families on various waiting lists in the community. Of the more than 500 families on the Hamilton-Wentworth Housing Authority waiting list alone, about 65 percent are considered 'in serious need' of housing. This situation will improve marginally as the City's Municipal Non-Profit Housing Corporation has only been granted 138 family units in 1986.

The demand for subsidized housing for disabled persons, youth and other special-needs groups should not be overlooked. The opening of Interval House for battered women this spring is a welcome, and long overdue, addition to the support network of the Region.

Social Service Utilization:

Patterns in the utilization of major social services in the Region indicate an increasing demand for service. More and more people are becoming aware of the human services network, particularly agencies which provide service to the elderly. It can be anticipated that agencies providing care and service for the elderly will face increasing pressures in the future as our population ages. As well, the demand for legal and daycare services can be expected to rise as the proportion of single-parent families increases.

Juxtaposed against this general scenario is a social service system which already feels stretched to the limit due to the increased demand for service experienced during the recession and a climate of fiscal restraint.

It is not anticipated that the various levels of government will provide funding increases in 1986 beyond the levels witnessed in previous years. The Regional government has attempted to keep increases to social service agencies to about 4 percent this year. There is no reason to believe that other levels of government will provide increments above this level.

The Federal Government's emphasis upon job creation in the private sector will likely have an impact upon the voluntary sector's ability to secure such funding. Programmes may become less attractive for agencies as restrictions upon sponsors are increased.

While the Federal Government has revoked the $100 standard charitable donation deduction, it does not appear to be prepared to accept 'parity for charity' by allowing charitable donations to be deducted in the same fashion as political donations.

COMMUNITY NEEDS

While the potential list of community needs in the Region is a lengthy one, certain gaps in service warrant particular attention due to their relationship to projected social trends and/or their historical persistence as an issue of community concern.

Some of these issues/needs would include, but are certainly not limited to, the following:

- services to single parents including the need for daycare, legal services, affordable housing, after-school support programmes and job training due to the projected increase in the single-parent family population;
- services to seniors including the need for live-in companions, health-related services and home support services as both the number of seniors, and their desire to remain in their homes, increases. Clarkson Gordon/Woods Gordon has also projected that "as more elderly singles choose to live independently...rather than [in] institutions, there will be a greater need for housekeeping assistance, prepared meals, organized social activities, house maintenance and repair services" (Tomorrow's Customers, 19th Edition, p.14).

- services to the unemployed including the need for re-training programmes, support and counselling services for older displaced workers, youth and women who were heavily impacted by the recession and less likely to be gainfully re-employed in the post-recession period.

- services to handicapped persons including physically disabled persons who require modified housing, home support care programmes, accessible transportation and employment opportunities in view of the right to maintain an independent living status in the community. As well, ex-psychiatric patients continue to require adequate support services in view of the Province's policy of deinstitutionalization. Community support programmes for developmentally/mentally handicapped persons (particularly over the age of 21) should not be overlooked in this Region.

- services to immigrants including the need for community services in their own language, English language classes, counselling and employment training programmes. Native services should also be considered.

- the increasing demand for self-help/support groups of various kinds. The Community Information Service Hamilton-Wentworth and others have identified a need for self-help groups in the health field (related to specific diseases) as well as for victims of various kinds of family abuse (wife, elder and child) and victims of crime.

Supporting information and data related to these community needs and anticipated social trends is available through the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton and District.

CONCLUSION

The Hamilton-Wentworth community can expect continued slow growth throughout 1986-87 and, indeed, until the end of the century. While municipalities such as Stoney Creek and Ancaster will undergo rapid expansion, the population of the City of Hamilton will likely decrease. Growth in the south Mountain area, however, can be anticipated as land is developed for residential purposes.

Our community can anticipate increasing numbers of seniors, single-parent families, smaller households, and families on subsidized housing waiting lists. The unemployment rate is likely to hover around the 8-9 percent range while the General Welfare caseload should decline by about 7 percent in 1986.

Shifting values and structural changes in the local economy point to the need for assistance to women, youth and older workers in securing gainful employment. The need for services to seniors and single parents should be monitored as their numbers increase. Support programmes to facilitate independent living for the handicapped population should also be examined by the community.

Certainly, these projections will have a definite effect upon the social service network as it attempts to meet the challenge posed by shifting social trends and community needs in view of finite financial resources.